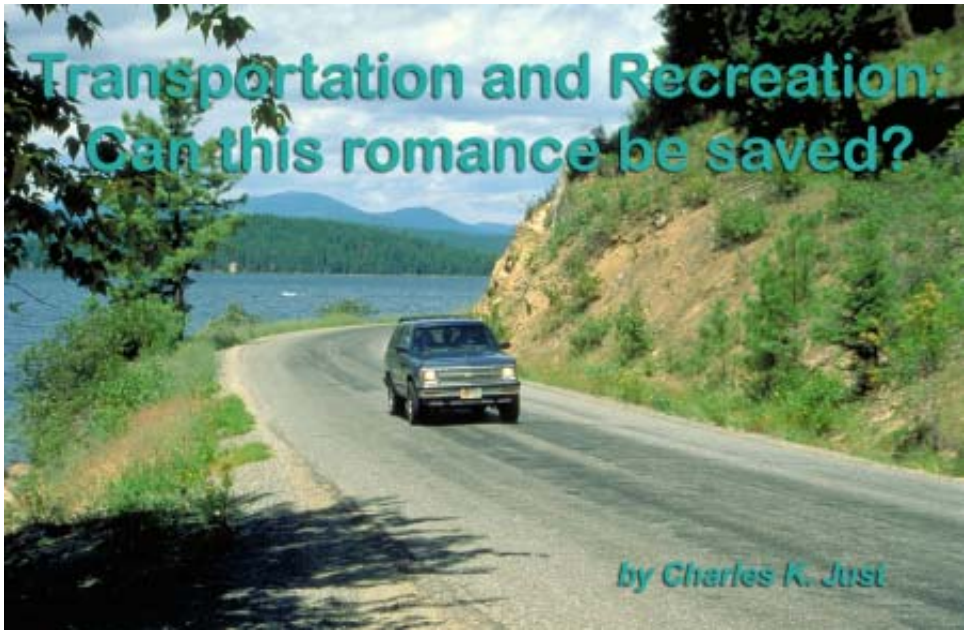
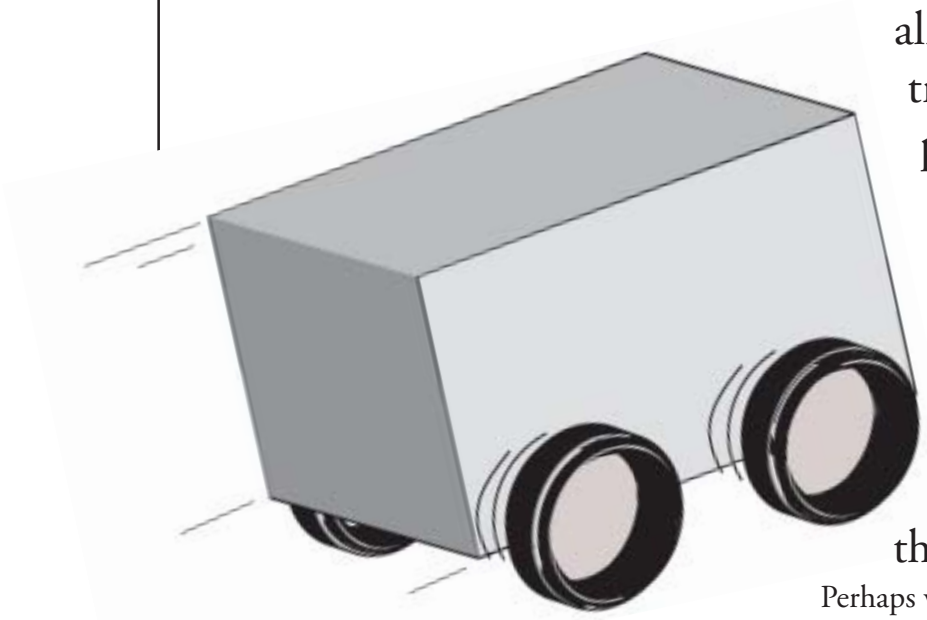


Transportation is the life blood of recreation. At whatever point one places himself, transportation got you there. From that point to wherever you recreate, transportation takes you there. We all take transportation pretty much for granted and it becomes an issue only when the roadway will not allow us to travel at our preferred speed or when we enter the showroom to contemplate that new ride.



Perhaps we should consider some of the elements of transportation when we contemplate the future of recreation in Idaho. We want a transportation system that is safe, modern, efficient, environmentally compatible and economical. It should get us where we want to go with few encumbrances

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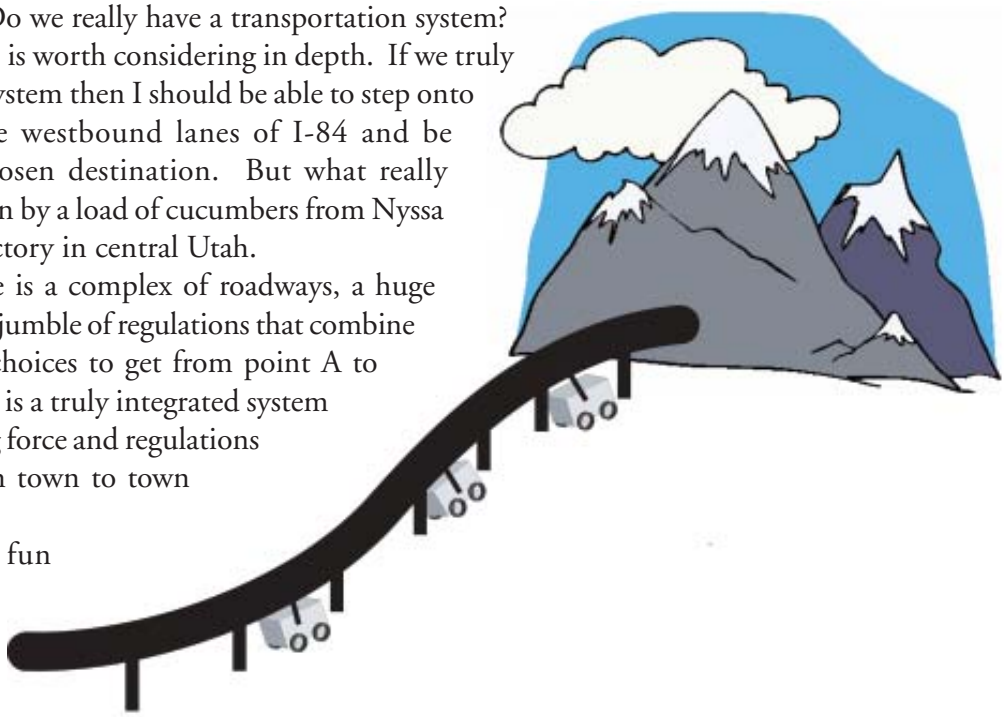
and little frustration. Do we really have a transportation system?

That last question is worth considering in depth. If we truly have a transportation system then I should be able to step onto the yellow line in the westbound lanes of I-84 and be transported to my chosen destination. But what really happens? I get run down by a load of cucumbers from Nyssa heading for a pickle factory in central Utah.



What we do have is a complex of roadways, a huge choice of vehicles and a jumble of regulations that combine to give us a chaos of choices to get from point A to point B. What we need is a truly integrated system with a common driving force and regulations that don't change from town to town or state to state.

Let's have some fun with this. Let's think within the box for a change. So many times we are told we have to think outside the box that we forget the inside of the box. For starters, imagine your dream choice for a box. Every day I see thousands of you in boxes with wheels and you are zipping along in relative comfort behind the wheel of your modern, efficient, fun to drive box. Lots of different shapes and designs but all boxes never the less.

Think how far we have come since that first box. Or have we? Well, remember what the first autos looked like. They were funny looking adaptations of a carriage, with four wheels, an internal combustion engine, one person full time control and they fouled the air with exhaust. So what's so different with the box we drive today? Our new box is faster, more aesthetically pleasing and more reliable but it's still essentially the same box; it's just fancier.

Do we really have a transportation system?

Suppose your box could be designed so that you drive it out of your garage, down the street to a grid system of overhead rails. An arm swigs up from its hidden storage in your box and slides into the overhead track. You punch the computer buttons to select your destination, hit enter and the car (the box) connects to an electric circuit. You sit back and read the morning paper, drink a latte' or open up your laptop. Maybe you want to watch the morning news on the pull down TV. Or perhaps you dial up a conference call to a branch office or several of your fellow employees in the field.

Whatever you do does not involve driving the box. Your box will take you quickly, safely and efficiently, by itself, to whatever destination you keyed in, whether it's another state or across town. While you are traveling, your box is having its batteries charged so that when you arrive at your destination the box is fully charged and ready to travel on its own.

Your box has two energy systems. The first is a compressed air driven engine that is quite similar to the one in your present box. The exciting difference is that spent compression is exhausted into the ambient

atmosphere with no pollutants; it is exhausting cleaner air than it took in because of the filtration system in the air compression sequence. Your new self driving box is actually taking in dirty air, cleaning it and exhausting clean air into the environment. When the compressed air tank is empty, pull into a nearby fueling stop for a three minute download or run on the second propulsion system, the electric batteries. Goodbye petrochemicals, goodbye pollution, hello transportation *system*.

Does this all sound a bit sci-fi? Perhaps so but all of this technology exists and is in operation today. In fact, one South Korean company has the compressed air car on the road and a French designer has one so close to production that Mexico City has already placed an order for several thousand of them for taxis. Japan and France have used magnetic levitation for high speed trains for years. The overhead electrical transport system is simply a modern version of the old trolley system and we have all used computers. Tomorrow is not far off.

This is truly a transportation system. It combines short distance commuting, long distance traveling, the roadway and the box all into one coherent system. It would be much safer than our present complex of roads and vehicles because the computer would control speed and distance from one vehicle to the next. Goodbye auto accidents We could use our same complex of roadways and increase capacity by several times.

The rail portion of the system could be tall enough to contain several layers of travelers. The longer the distance you plan to travel, the higher in the system you would be directed and the faster you would travel With a magnetic-levitation (mag-lev) component, your box might be capable of 250 mph between Boise and Coeur D'Alene and then 35 mph on reverse pollution compressed air power on the surface street to the resort.

Additional advantages would be the reduction of winter road clearing operations. Let the snow pile up since your wheels never touch the ground until near your destination. Forget spinouts and travel plans abandoned because of storm. On surface streets , in bad weather, your box would be all wheel drive with an electric motor on each wheel for great stability and control.

Recreation would benefit from several different aspects of this system. Suppose you want to take your family to Yellowstone Park. Rent your self a bigger box, even an RV box. Hop the rail to West Yellowstone and connect to the intra park rail system. Roads are now gone in Yellowstone as are all motor driven vehicles.

The rail system in the park covers twice as much area as did the old road system but it is now much safer because the boxes are twelve feet above the ground. Seeing bears and wolves is easy but having them get to your box is impossible. Your box is traveling by mag-lev so it is virtually silent and the animals pay it no attention because it does not register as a threat to them. Pull off the rail at Old Faithful and watch the show, park your RV at the campground and get out with your family to see the sights.

Your son and daughter want to really rough it, none of this campground stuff for them! The system still works. Hop the rail with your box of choice

and go to the exit nearest your recreational site. Leave the rail and drive on the surface roads to your chosen destination, just as you would today with your V-10, diesel, 4X4 box. Your all wheel electric drive has far more torque than did your old fossil fuel box so rough country back roads are no problem

The implication here is that you could easily do a Bryce Canyon or Moab, Utah weekend from Boise. Perhaps a Glacier Park or Disneyland jaunt for a long weekend. Any place you can easily fly today for a weekend of recreation would be available in a mag-lev system. The airplane would fly faster but there would be no airport hassle and no, or very little, chance of interruption because of weather or delayed connecting flights in your personal box of choice.

This system would open up tourism for smaller communities to a far greater extent than is now possible. The Old Time Fiddlers in Weiser would now have a Saturday afternoon market from Seattle to Billings. A weekend Boyd Coddington custom car show in Rupert could have a weekend draw from San Francisco to Fargo. A weekend western art festival in Cascade could draw from Calgary to Denver.

In order to make this system a reality, community planners, regional planners, state and federal transportation people and vehicle manufacturers of all types would need to come together and plan for the change in travel patterns, social consequences, infrastructure and law enforcement that would come with the greater mobility of the traveling public.

One great change in traveling might be that travel trailers could become much more comfortable. For the frequent recreation traveler, your trailer would be equipped with the gear your particular recreation requires. When you go to the rail to travel, why take your towing vehicle? Just attach a connection appendage to the trailer, tow it with your ATV to the rail and leave your ATV at home. When you arrive at your destination a rental ATV type vehicle would be there to take your trailer to an inner city location. Your trailer would hook up to utilities in an upscale, multi story parking facility and there you have your own motel room.

For business people the trailer would also contain an office but the method of travel would be the same. If you need transportation at your destination, you could tow your trailer with a very small vehicle since you would not need to get out on the highway to maneuver the trailer. All you would need is enough pulling power to get to the rail from your home and from the rail to a destination parking slot for your personal motel.

The opportunities for creating new jobs with this system are incredible. An army of engineers, designers and manufacturers would be needed. Designing an aesthetically pleasing multilayer rail system to replace our interstate highway system would be a major task. Engineering the connecting pod from our vehicle to the overhead rail would be another challenge.

Deciding who would own the connecting arm is another issue. It could hang from the rail and be owned by the system or it could be owned by the individual and built into the vehicle. Perhaps both plans could be used in the transition time from our present highway complex to the new system.

The implication here is that you could easily do a Bryce Canyon or Moab, Utah weekend from Boise.

We have had some fun imagining a future transportation system and now we must get to the sober reality of our present day. Every day more and more vehicles are entering our roadway grid. These new vehicles are designed to travel faster and farther than even the vehicles of five years ago but our roadway grid is swiftly reaching capacity and, in some major metropolitan areas, has already reached capacity.

Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle, New York, Chicago are all at vehicle capacity and many other smaller cities are nearing capacity. Even Boise, Coeur d' Alene, Meridian, parts of Idaho Falls and Pocatello are in traffic capacity trouble. There simply is no way to construct enough asphalt lane capacity to meet the demand that is accumulating daily.

Every year 40,000 to 50,000 people die on our highways and tens of thousands more are injured. This is the equivalent of a Viet Nam war every year. Say that again…every year.

Billions of dollars are spent each year in maintaining our present roadway complex and the problem continues. Mass transit in the form of light rail and busses is not going solve the problem. Those solutions work only marginally well in high population density areas where destinations are close to the transit terminals. Bicycles and walking are not going to solve the overall congestion problem although they are good things to do.

At the turn of the century, when autos were a novelty, the big traffic problems were carriage congestion and horse poop. Our problem is still congestion and pollution, it's just fancier.

So, to tie this all together, what is the future of recreation and transportation? Without transportation there will be little recreation as we know it. It would be worthwhile, as you clear the cobwebs from your mind in your favorite recreational pursuit, to contemplate the issue of how your children and grandchildren will recreate. What are you willing to endure to start the change to a new transportation paradigm?

Charles K. Just is an Environmental Planner with the Idaho Transportation Department. The opinions expressed here are his own and may not represent the opinions of the Idaho Transportation Department